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Letter dated 29 July 2016 from the Permanent Representatives of Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Spain and the United Kingdom, as co-chairs of the Security Council Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security, would like to share a summary note of the meeting held on 13 July 2016 on the situation of women, peace and security in Afghanistan.

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

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Security Council Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security

Summary of meeting on Afghanistan, 13 July 2016

On 13 July, the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security was briefed by Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and Danielle Bell, Director of the Human Rights Unit, who were accompanied by Deputy Special Representatives Mark Bowden and Pernille Dahler Kardel, as well as senior mission staff and country representatives of United Nations entities, funds and programmes based in Kabul and Islamabad.

The Special Representative reflected on the positive developments in gender equality and the women, peace and security agenda since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. He elaborated in particular on the legal and policy measures established in the last few months under the National Unity Government, including, among others, the national action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and the national strategy for the elimination of violence against women. He observed that implementation remained uneven owing to the weak capacity of institutions mandated to protect women's rights; insecurity, which prevented the Government and the United Nations from accessing women in Taliban-controlled areas; a culture of impunity and weak rule of law; and difficulties in changing social norms. He highlighted the need to ensure gender-sensitive electoral processes and the need for safe work environments for women in the security sector, in order to improve participation and representation of women in public spheres.

The Special Representative described recent developments regarding women's political participation. The recent reintroduction of the 25 per cent quota in the Parliament was expected to increase the number of Afghan women running for office, but increased numbers had not yet resulted in meaningful participation. A gender-sensitive environment and security measures would help support this. UNAMA welcomed the recent announcement that a woman would have a leading position in the High Peace Council, as well as the appointment of another woman as Deputy for administrative and finance affairs in the Attorney-General's Office. He noted that the number of female employees in government had reached only 3,000, and only 1,400 in the Ministry of Defence, which was a very low proportion; an increase in female held-positions was critical for building peace and stability in Afghanistan.

UNAMA staff provided an overview of the impact of the conflict on women's rights. Anti-Government elements were deliberately limiting freedom of movement of women and girls, which impacted their access to livelihood, medical care and education. Furthermore, women in the public sphere had been violently targeted or received threats, including three recent incidents of anti-Government elements opening fire on policewomen. Afghan women continued to bear the brunt of violent extremism; the Mission had documented cases in which the Taliban and anti-Government elements

punished women for so-called "moral crimes" through executions or lashings amounting to torture. Nevertheless, women had crucial roles to play in the peace and security processes, including countering violent extremism.

UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group, provided a list of recommendations related to furthering the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda in Afghanistan through UNAMA, the Government and the Security Council. The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict noted challenges in collecting and analysing information on conflict-related sexual violence and flagged concerns regarding the presence of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) (Daesh) in Afghanistan.

In response to questions from Council members, representatives of UNAMA and other United Nations entities noted the following.

On gender mainstreaming in the Mission: The gender unit merged with the Human Rights Unit in 2014. The capacity of UNAMA staff has been strengthened through gender training. Gender task forces that are present in each of the UNAMA field offices enable different sections of the Mission to share information and align interventions related to women, peace and security. Three principals and heads of sections of UNAMA meet quarterly for a senior gender dialogue to strategize on gender equality and the women, peace and security agenda. However, there is no senior gender adviser at the D-1 level in the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, as recommended by the 2015 global study on women, peace and security. The Special Representative is committed to increasing the number of national and international female staff within UNAMA. He and other representatives expressed the need for the Council to allocate additional resources in order for the Mission to more effectively engage Afghan partners in implementing the women, peace and security agenda.

On women's participation: The Government is very much aware of the challenges concerning women's participation in upcoming electoral processes. In order to deal with this important issue, it has created a commission. UNAMA is advising the Government to minimize practices such as the collection of women's votes by men. Consulting with civil society is also considered an integral part of the Mission's work.

On the national action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000): Some US$ 51 million is required for the implementation of the action plan, and the funding gap currently stands at US$ 29 million. The bulk of funding for the action plan is focused on area 4: relief and recovery. While area 4 is important, areas 1 to 3, focused on prevention, participation and protection, would ensure long-term improvements in terms of implementation of the women, peace and security agenda. More work is needed to ensure the active involvement of ministries in the effective implementation of the action plan.

On conflict-related sexual violence: Sexual violence remains chronically underreported owing to insecurity, difficulties in accessing services, stigma and the risk of being charged with *zina* (sexual intercourse outside of marriage) and other violent repercussions. There is insufficient evidence to indicate that parties to the conflict are responsible for systematic patterns of sexual violence. UNAMA shares the concern of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict regarding possible consequences for women of the

influence of some ISIL (Daesh)-affiliated groups in parts of eastern Afghanistan, but for the moment this presence is unlikely to expand.

On women's protection: There is a need to move towards a survivor-centred approach. For example, in 2015 the Ministry of the Interior waived the requirement of proof of residence to allow survivors of violence living in shelters to receive identity cards; this should be a regular provision.

On displacement: The number of internally displaced persons reached 400,000 in 2015 and continues to rise in 2016. More than half of the displaced are women and girls. There is a need to increase the number of female staff of the humanitarian actors, Government and civil society organizations in order to reach out and understand the challenges faced by women and girls in that context.

The co-chairs of the Informal Expert Group reiterated their thanks to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and highlighted the importance of increased information on the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda in Afghanistan being communicated to the Security Council through the regular briefings and reporting, as called for in Security Council resolutions 2122 (2013) and 2242 (2015). They asked UNAMA to identify some specific goals related to the women, peace and security topics discussed which could be achievable over the next 6 to12 months and beyond, on which the Informal Expert Group will follow up. A second, more focused meeting of the Informal Expert Group on Afghanistan will take place by the end of the year.